

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 NEW DE 18384 01 OF 02 231749Z
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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8057
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 18384

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
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SUBJECT: ZIA VISIT; MINORITIES, DISSIDENTS, FARAKKA AND JUTE

REF: NEW DELHI 18240

SUMMARY. ACCORDING TO THE MEA JOINT SECRETARY FOR BANGLADESH, FOUR MAIN SUBJECTS WERE DISCUSSED IN THE OFFICIAL TALKS DURING PRESIDENT ZIA'S VISIT: 1) MINORITIES IN BANGLADESH; 2) DISSIDENT BANGLADESHIS IN INDIA; 3) FARAKKA; AND 4) JUTE INTERNATIONAL. THE MEA, HOWEVER, HAS YET TO GET A READING ON WHAT TRANSPIRED DURING THE PRIVATE SESSION BETWEEN ZIA AND MARARJI DESAI, THE KEY EVENT IN ANY REAL ASSESSMENT OF THE TRIP. A BANGALDESH HIGH COMMISSION OFFICER GAVE A DIFFERENT VERSION OF THE VISIT, CLAIMING THAT MINORITIES AND DISSIDENTS WERE NOT AT ISSUE. END SUMMARY.

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PAGE 02 NEW DE 18384 01 OF 02 231749Z

1. ACCORDING TO M. DUBE, MEA JOINT SECRETARY FOR BANGLADESH, FOUR MAIN SUBJECTS WERE DISCUSSED IN THE OFFICIAL TALKS DURING THE VISIT OF BANGLADESH PRESIDENT ZIAUR RAHMAN; 1) THE SITUATION OF THE MINORITIES IN BANGLADESH; 2) THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF DISSIDENT BANGLADESHIS IN INDIA; 3) THE FARAKKA ACCORD; AND 4) JUTE INTERNATIONAL. DUBE TOLD EMBOFFS DECEMBER 22

THAT THE MEA HAD YET TO OBTAIN A BRIEFING FROM THE PRIME MINISTER OF HIS 90-MINUTE PRIVATE SESSION WITH ZIA, BUT DUBE SAID THAT THE VISIT HAD SERVED TO INCREASE THE PERSONAL RAPPORT BETWEEN THE TWO LEADERS WHICH HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED AT THE COMMONWEALTH MEETING IN LONDON AND BY A CONTINUING EXCHANGE OF LETTERS. BECAUSE THE TALKS IN DELHI BETWEEN THE FULL DELEGATIONS HAD BEEN BRIEF, HE ADDED, FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE DECIDED TO ACCOMPANY ZIA TO AJMER ON THE SECOND DAY FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION, THE RESULTS OF WHICH VAJPAYEE CONVEYED TO DUBE.

2. MINORITIES : DUBE SAID THAT THE MINORITIES ISSUE WAS NOT ONLY THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECT DISCUSSED BUT ALSO THE MOST DELICATE ONE FOR THE INDIANS TO RAISE BECAUSE IT LEAVES THEM OPEN TO CHARGES OF INTERFERING IN BANGLADESH'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. THE INDIANS TOLD THE BANGLADESHIS, HE SAID, THAT THE MATTER WAS ENTIRELY WITHIN THEIR JURISDICTION BUT THAT IT DID IMPACT ON BILATERAL RELATIONS AND THE REPEATED REPORTS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST HINDUS AND AN EXODUS TO INDIA MADE IT INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT FOR THE GOI TO DEFEND ITS POLICIES TOWARD BANGLADESH. THE BANGLADESHIS RESPONDED THAT THE GOI ITSELF IN PARLIAMENT HAD SAID THAT THE INFLUX HAS NOT BEEN ANY GREATER THAN USUAL, AND THEY ALSO POINTED TO PRESIDENT ZIA'S RECENT

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 NEW DE 18384 01 OF 02 231749Z

SPEECH IN DACCA IN WHICH HE HAD SAID THAT THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR COMMUNALISM IN BANGLADESH AND THAT HIS POLITICAL FRONT WOULD BE OPEN TO ALL REGARDLESS OF CREED. HOWEVER, DUBE INSISTED TO EMBOFFS, THE "ONE-WAY TRAFFIC" OF BANGLADESHIS WAS SIGNIFICANT. IN ADDITION TO THE 8,000 WOULD-BE ENTRANTS TURNED BACK AT THE BORDER THIS YEAR, THERE WAS AN ESTIMATED 12,000 BANGLADESHIS VISITORS WHO OVERSTAYED THEIR VISAS AND THE NUMBER OF UNDETECTED ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS MIGHT BE FOUR TIMES THE NUMBER CAUGHT. THUS, HE SAID, THERE MAY BE AS MANY AS 50,000 ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS AND WOULD-BE IMMIGRANTS A YEAR. HE CONCEDED THAT IN ASSAM THE MIGRANTS WERE MOSTLY MUSLIM, BUT THOSE WHO CROSSED INTO WEST BENGAL WERE LARGELY HINDUS AND COMPRISED AT LEAST 70 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL. AS FOR DISCRIMINATION AGAINST HINDUS, THE BANGLADESHIS ASKED THE INDIANS TO BRING SPECIFIC CASES TO THEIR ATTENTION, BUT DUBE SAID THAT THIS WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE GOI TO DO SINCE IT DEFINITELY WOULD CONSTITUTE INTERFERENCE. MOREOVER, IT COULD HURT THE INTERESTS OF THOSE FOR WHOM THE GOI INTERCEDED. DUBE ALSO MENTIONED THAT THE MEA HAD PREPARED A STRONG PARAGRAPH ON MINORITY

RIGHTS IN THE DRAFT COMMUNIQUE BUT THE BANGLADESHIS
WOULD NOT AGREE TO ITS INCLUSION.

3. DISSIDENTS: THE BANGLADESHIS RAISED THE ISSUE AND
ASKED THE INDIANS WHY THEY PERMITTED THE DISSIDENT
POLITICIANS TO STAY ON IN INDIA. THEY ALSO COMPLAINED
THAT SOME OF THE DISSIDENTS WERE "REGROUPING." THE
INDIANS REPLIED THAT THEY COULD NOT FORCE ANYONE TO
RETURN TO BANGLADESH AND DENIED THE ALLEGATION THAT
DISSIDENTS WERE REGROUPING. DUBE SAID THAT THE GOI
WAS ENFORCING THE BAN ON ANY POLITICAL ACTIVITY BY
THESE ELEMENTS AND HAD TOLD THE BANGLADESH DELEGATION
THAT PROBABLY SOME OF THE RETURNEES HAD "SLIPPED
AWAY", AND MIGHT BE CREATING INCIDENTS BOTH IN BANGLADESH
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 NEW DE 18384 01 OF 02 231749Z

AND ON ON THE BORDER BEYOND ANZONE'S CONTROL. TIGER
SIDDIQU'S CALLS ON GOI LEADERS WAS NOT RAIDED IN
THE DELEGATION TALKS, AND DUBE COMMENTED THAT THE
BANGALDESHIS SEEM TO HAVE ACCEPTED THAT THE INDIAN
PURPOSE IN SEEING SIDDIQUI IN DELHI WAS TO REMIND
TIM AGAIN THAT POLITICAL ACTIVITY WOULD NOT BE PERMITTED.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 18384 02 OF 02 231804Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 18384

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

4. IN SHARP CONTRAST TO THE IMPORTANCE DUBE ASSIGNED TO THE MINORITIES AND DISSIDENT ISSUES IN THE TALKS, BANGLADESH FIRST SECRETARY MAHMOOD ALI HAS SAID THAT THE TWO ISSUES HAD RECEIVED LITTLE ATTENTION. HE TOLD AN EMBOFF DECEMBER 22 THAT ZIA HAD SIMPLY STATED THE BDG POLICY THAT "THERE ARE NO MINORITIES" SINCE ALL ARE CITIZENS OF BANGLADESH. ALI ALSO SAID THAT DISSIDENT POLITICIANS HAD NOT BEEN DISCUSSED AND, WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE BORDER SITUATION, REPLIED THAT THERE WERE NO INCIDENTS ANY MORE. HE AGREED THAT TIGER SIDDIQUI HAD NOT BEEN MENTIONED, AND COMMENTED THAT THE INDIANS SEEMED MORE UPSET ABOUT SIDDIQUI THAN THE BANGLADESHIS WERE. HE VOLUNTEERED THAT SIDDIQUI HAD APPROACHED THE DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER IN CALCUTTA SEE

KING AN INTERVIEW WITH ZIA IN DELHI;

ZIA REFUSED TO SEE HIM.

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PAGE 02 NEW DE 18384 02 OF 02 231804Z

5. FARAKKA: THE JOINT RIVERS COMMISSION HAD BEEN ELEVATED TO THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL AT THE REQUEST OF THE BANGLADESHIS. DUBE SPECULATED THAT THE REQUEST REFLECTED THE DESIRE OF B.M. ABBAS, WHO NOW HAD MINISTERIAL RANK, TO CONTINUE TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH FARAKKA. HE ADDED THAT BOTH SIDES REALIZE THAT THE POLITICAL-LEVEL LEADERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION IS NECESSARY IF THERE IS TO BE ANY PROGRESS. THE GOI HAS NOT YET DECIDED WHETHER JAGJIVAN RAM OR IRRIGATION MINISTER BARNALA WILL LEAD THE INDIAN SIDE. ON THE LONG-TERM SOLUTION, THE BANGLADESHIS WANTED THE COMMISSION TO EXPLORE FIRST THEIR PROPOSAL OF A STORAGE SYSTEM WITH NEPAL BEFORE TURNING TO OTHER OPTIONS, BUT THE INDIANS ARGUED THAT FOCUSING FIRST ON THE STORAGE SYSTEM PROPOSAL MIGHT CONSUME THE ENTIRE THREE-YEAR PERIOD FOR FINDING A SOLUTION AND THEREFORE THE COMMISSION SHOULD INVESTIGATE ALL OPTIONS SIMULTANEOUSLY. THE INDIAN VIEW PREVAILED. OUR BANGLADESHI SOURCE CONFIRMED DUBE'S ACCOUNT OF THE FARAKKA DISCUSSIONS BUT WENT ON TO DISCUSS WITH SOME ENTHUSIASM THE BANGLADESHI PERCEPTION THAT MORARJI DESAI FAVORS THE STORAGE SYSTEM SOLUTION.

6. JUTE INTERNATIONAL: DUBE EXPLAINED THAT THE BDG HAD BEEN DRAGGING ITS FEET ON JUTE INTERNATIONAL, PRESUMABLY BECAUSE OF THE FARAKKA IMPASSE. RECENTLY,

HOWEVER, THE BDG HAD DROPPED SOME HINTS ELSEWHERE OF A RENEWAL OF INTEREST. THE INDIANS ASKED THE BANGLADESHIS, THEREFORE, IF THEY COULD NOT NOW GO AHEAD SINCE JUTE INTERNATIONAL WAS IN THE INTERESTS OF BOTH COUNTRIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WANTED TO SUPPORT IT, ZIA, HE SAID, AGREED.
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 NEW DE 18384 02 OF 02 231804Z

7. DUBE SAID THAT OTHER "MINOR" ISSUES WERE ALSO DISCUSSED, INCLUDING RESPECTIVE TRANSIT ARRANGEMENTS. PRESIDENT ZIA DID NOT RAISE IN THE TALKS THE QUESTION OF ARMS REDUCTIONS IN THE SUBCONTINENT WHICH HE MENTIONED LATER IN HIS BANQUET SPEECH. ZIA ALSO DID NOT MENTION HIS PLANS FOR THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF BANGLADESH.

8. ASKED ABOUT THE IMPETUS OF THE VISIT, DUBE MENTIONED THE RAPPORT WITH DESAI AND THE DESIRE OF BOTH SIDES TO BUILD ON THE MOMENTUM OF THE FARAKKA AGREEMENT. THE INDIANS, HE SAID, WERE ALSO AWARE THAT DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS MIGHT HAVE INFLUENCED ZIA IN SEEKING A VISIT, AND HE NOTED THE PRESENCE IN THE OFFICIAL PARTY OF DACCA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION CHAIRMAN HASNAT AND THE HEAD OF THE FREEDOM FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION. HE HASTENED TO ADD THAT WHATEVER ZIA'S MOTIVES, THE BANGLADESHIS HAD BEEN FORTHCOMING IN THE TALKS AND NOT SOUGHT TO AVOID ANY ISSUES AND THAT ZIA HAD BEEN EVEN MORE EFFUSIVE IN HIS DEPARTURE STATEMENT THAN PRESIDENT REDDY IN PRAISING THE OUTCOME OF THE VISIT.

9. COMMENT: THE STRONG EMPHASIS THAT DUBE PLACED ON THE DISCUSSION OF MINORITIES AND DISSIDENTS IS SOMEWHAT SURPRISING AND, AS NOTED, AT VARIANCE WITH THE VIEWS OF AT LEAST ONE BANGLADESHI DIPLOMAT. IN HIS PREFATORY REMARKS TO US, DUBE SPOKE OF THE SINCERE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS BUT CAUTIONED THAT THERE WERE CONSTRAINTS PRESENT, MOSTLY RELATED TO THE "INTERNAL SITUATION" IN BANGLADESH. HENCE, HIS INTERPRETATION OF THE VISIT MAY REFLECT A PERSONAL, IF NOT OFFICIAL VIEW, THAT THE RELATIONSHIP IS STILL FRAGILE AND THAT THE MINORITIES AND DISSIDENTS ARE THE TWO POLITICAL ISSUES MOST LIKELY TO DISRUPT THE PROCESS OF RAPPROACHMENT.
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 NEW DE 18384 02 OF 02 231804Z

10. WHAT IS MISSING IN ALL THIS, OF COURSE, IS ANY REPORT OF WHAT OCCURRED DURING THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENT OF THE VISIT, THE PRIVATE SESSION BETWEEN ZIA AND MORARJI. WE HAVE HEARD ELSEWHERE OF MARORJI'S PRACTICE OF NOT DEBRIEFING THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF AFTER SESSIONS OF THIS NATURE AND THINK IT LIKELY THAT DUBE WAS NOT BEING SIMPLY RETICENT BUT IS IN FACT UNAWARE OF WHAT TRANSPIRED. HE WAS BEING DISINGENUOUS, HOWEVER, IN STATING TO US THAT THE GOI IGNORED THE DOMESTIC IMPLICATIONS FOR ZIA OF THE VISIT. AS WE NOTED IN REFTEL, THE GOI WENT OUT OF ITS WAY TO PRAISE ZIA AS A STRONG NATIONAL LEADER AND MAN OF INTERNATIONAL REPUTE. GOHEEN

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